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**CARLINO'S CROSSINGS: STUART HOOD, DANTE AND
A CIVIL WAR IN TUSCANY (1943-4)**

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The essay – which forms part of a larger project on travellers across the Tuscan Apennines – addresses three aspects of Dante's presence in the region: first the poet's documented associations with and references to the mountains in which Stuart Hood (1915-2011) would find himself during the later years of World War II; secondly how readers of Dante had traced those associations within this landscape, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (from the rise of bourgeois tourism to the Second World War); and thirdly Hood's wartime journeys in the Apennines and the relevance of his reading of Dante to the Tuscan "civil war" in which he himself became a combatant and to his later memoirs and novels which recall that conflict.

Keywords: *Inferno*, World War II, Tuscany

"Now crossing over the leafy shoulders of the Apennines, we shall continue the hunt down the left side of Italy ..."¹

High in the foothills of the Tuscan Apennines above Prato there is a village called Migliana. From the ridge above, streams run off in both directions and lead down through a maze of confluences to the valley of the Bisenzio. It was to Migliana in December 1943 – a year before the Allied armies reached the "Gothic Line" in the Apennines – that there came a young Scottish infantry and intelligence officer, Stuart Hood (1915-2011). Already a talented linguist and political activist, Hood came to be well known after the War as an innovative Controller of BBC TV programmes during a liberalizing period in the early Sixties; he would also become a prolific novelist, translator, documentary-maker and professor of film studies. At the time of his arrival in this Apennine village he was 28; and having volunteered for service at the outbreak of the war, he had been taken prisoner during the North African campaign and

¹ "Transeuntēs nunc humeros Apenīni frondiferos, levam Ytaliā continuatim venemur" Dante, *DVE* 1. 14.1 [all translations unless otherwise stated are my own].

transferred to Italy. At the time of the September 1943 armistice, he had like many of the Allied prisoners of war been released by the Italians, and now, along with several of those whose stories cross the Apennines, he had taken to the hills to escape the German occupiers and their Fascist allies. In Migliana Hood was to take refuge for most of the winter of 1943–4, and there, in the early stages of what has been called Italy's *guerra civile*,² he would spend some of his enforced leisure reading Dante.

The following essay forms part of a larger project on travellers across the Tuscan Apennines from the Middle Ages to the Second World War.³ As a sample of that project, it addresses three aspects of Dante's presence in the region: first his documented associations with and references to the mountains in which Stuart Hood found himself; secondly how later readers and writers traced those associations within this landscape, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (from the rise of bourgeois tourism to the Second World War); and thirdly Hood's wartime journeys in the Apennines and the relevance of his reading of Dante to the Tuscan "civil war" in which he himself became a combatant.

I

Dante's own journeys in the Tuscan Apennines have left traces in the records of his exile, in his work itself, and at many points in its reception. The earliest evidence locating the poet as *peregrino* in banishment is a document of June 1302 listing those present at a meeting of the White Guelph *fuorusciti* in the abbey church of San Godenzo, some fifty kilometres north-east of Florence and close to one of the main passes across the Apennines; whilst a report based

² Notably by Claudio Pavone; see Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); English translation: Claudio Pavone, *A Civil War: a history of the Italian Resistance*, trans. Peter Levy with the assistance of David Broder. Edited with an introduction by Stanislaw G. Pugliese (London: Verso, 2013).

³ Travellers in and writers on this region will thus include, for example: medieval mercants, clerics and pilgrims; Dante, Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Montaigne; participants in and guides to the 17th- and 18th-century Grand Tour; a number of Romantic and later 19th- and 20th-century authors; as well as combatants in the Second World War. For an introduction to later travel-writing on the central region of the Tuscan Apennines, see Attilio Brilli, ed., *Viaggio in Casentino. Una valle nello specchio della cultura europea e americana 1791–1912* (Città di Castello: Edimond, 1997). On various aspects of Italian travel, see John Stoye, *English Travellers Abroad 1604–1667* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); John Ingamells, ed., *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701–1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2003); Attilio Brilli, *Il Viaggio in Italia. Storia di una grande tradizione culturale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006). For some relevant studies of literary tourism, see below, n. 15.

on a local chronicle places him just across the ridge at Forlì (perhaps as an emissary of the Whites at the Ordelaifi court) in the fall of that year.⁴ By the time he began the *Commedia* five or six years later, Dante had travelled widely between northern Tuscany and the Lombard plain, and an early work of his exile, *De vulgari eloquentia* imagines the Apennines as a significant watershed in his linguistic map of Italy.⁵ During this and later stages of his wanderings, he must have actually crossed those “leafy shoulders” a number of times, with all the challenges and risks that travel in such rugged terrain would have carried. As a number of later writers have claimed – some more imaginatively than others – the physical and mental stress of straying from the right path among the densely forested valleys and ridges of the high Tuscan Apennines may have informed the confusion and panic that beset Dante’s fictional *peregrino* between the dark wood and the mountain in the *Infèrno*’s first canto. Conversely, in the middle of the *Purgatorio* (17.1–12) the reader is invited to recall the moment of relief as thick mist lifts off the *alpe*.⁶

Several sources dated shortly before or during the composition of the *Commedia* place Dante among the Tuscan Apennines and in locations that several of his works would specifically evoke. Two documents of 6 October 1306 mention ‘Dante Alegerii de Florentia’ as representative of the Malaspina family in their negotiations with the local bishop about control of castles in the Val di Magra, on the western slopes of the Alpi Apuane (a geologically distinct spur of the Apennine range). Dante’s hosts and employers in this case held territory in the Lunigiana, and the Marchese

⁴ See Renato Piattoli, *Codice diplomatico dantesco* (Firenze: Gonnelli, 1950), 50. Scarpetta degli Ordelaifi gets an honourable mention among the nobility of the Romagna in *Inf.* 27.43–45. All quotations from the *Commedia* here follow the text of Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, *Dante Alighieri, ‘Commedia’* (2nd edition, Milan: Mondadori, 1991–7).

⁵ Dante, *DVE*, 1. 10. 4 and 1. 14. 1. For a Latin text with English translation, see Dante. 1996. *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. Stephen Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 22–5 and 32–3.

⁶ The disorientation of *Inf.* 1 is re-imagined as part of an Apennine crossing at the opening of Francesco Fioretti’s historical novel: Francesco Fioretti, *Il libro segreto di Dante* (Rome: Newton Compton, 2011) 23–8. The mountain *nebbia* of *Purg.* 17 is recalled, for instance, in the account of an Apennine expedition in the autumn of 1841 by the Tuscan satirical poet Giuseppe Giusti (1808–50); see Giuseppe Giusti, *Epistolario di Giuseppe Giusti: Volume Primo (1822– 1843)*, ed. Ferdinando Martini (Florence: Le Monnier, 1932), 379–81. *Alpe* in *Purg.* 17.1 and elsewhere in Dante is a generic term for “mountainous country” and, as Chiavacci Leonardi points out in her note on *Inf.* 12.2, it survives as such in dialect and place-names (e.g., San Benedetto in Alpe, Alpe di Catenaia etc.): whilst in Dante and his Tuscan contemporaries it applies particularly to the Apennines. Conversely, [*A*]pennino can refer to the Alps, as in *DVE* 1.8.6 and *Inf.* 20.65.

Moroello was a politically and militarily prominent figure who had been an adversary of the White Guelfs since 1302.⁷ In the circle of Dante's thieves, the "bestial" Vanni Fucci rejoices prophetically in Moroello's imminent defeat of Dante's erstwhile allies. He imagines the Marchese as a force of nature, descending upon Pistoia from the savage peaks of the Apuane:

Tragge Marte vapor di Val di Magra
ch'è di torbidi nuvoli involuto;
e con tempesta impetüosa e agra

sovra Campo Picen fia combattuto
ond' ei repente spezzerà la nebbia,
sì che ogne Bianco ne sarà feruto."⁸

As well as acting as a procurator for the Malaspina family, Dante would also reply on Moroello's behalf to a sonnet from Cino da Pistoia (c.1307) and around 1308 would send the Marchese a letter and a major poem: the *canzone montanina*.⁹ The letter to Moroello speaks of having left the Malaspina court to "set foot by the streams of the Arno", whilst the attached *canzone montanina* ("Amor da che convien") refers in its conclusion to being *in mezzo l'alpi* ("in the midst of the mountains") and more specifically in the valley of the Arno.¹⁰ These markers may indicate that Dante was by then further east along the Apennine ridge, in the Casentino, where he was to return as a guest of the Guidi family at Poppi in 1311 and where, "beneath the springs of the Arno" (below Monte Falterona), he would compose two of his most well-known political letters.¹¹

Both the Casentino and the Malaspina domains in the Val di Magra and the Lunigiana are named and emotively evoked again in the *Commedia*. The landscapes of the former are an especially powerful presence in simile, myth and memory throughout the

⁷ See Piattoli, *Codice diplomatico dantesco*, 116–25; also, for further accounts of the negotiations in October 1306, Alessandro D'Ancona et al., *Dante e la Lunigiana* (Milan: Hoepli, 1909), 29 and 176–82. Moroello may have met Dante at Florence in 1288; he became *podestà* of Bologna in 1298, and captured Pistoia from the Whites in 1306, subsequently becoming *capitano del popolo* there and leader of the Tuscan Guelfs in 1307.

⁸ *Inf.* 24.145–150.

⁹ Texts and translations of the letters and the *canzone* are in *Dantis Alagherii Epistolarum. The Letters of Dante*, ed. Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 19–41.

¹⁰ In Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 209–10 (lines 61–3; see also Contini's note on *Alpi* here).

¹¹ Dante 1966, 63–105 (March and April 1311).

poem – from the thundering waterfall of Acquacheta and the streams flowing down the green hills above Romena, through the raging torrent of the Archiano and the serpent-like crawl of the Arno as it emerges from below Falterona, to the *crudo sasso tra Tevere ed Arno* which forms the site of a saint's transfiguration.¹² And at the key moment of the encounter with Beatrice in the *paradiso terrestre*, an extended simile will compare the penitent's dissolving into contrition with the melting of long-frozen snow on the branches of pines in Apennine forests.¹³ Those same branches are, in a striking metonymy, spoken of as *vive travi*, 'living beams' – a reminder, perhaps, of how great cities such as Florence and Rome had long drawn vital material for construction and reconstruction out of the recesses of the Apennine wilderness.¹⁴

II

Later writers would trace and dwell upon Dante's "footsteps" in the Tuscan Apennines, as elsewhere in the Italian landscape. Along with the rise in bourgeois tourism and what has been called "necromanticism",¹⁵ after the end of the Napoleonic wars, there was increasing interest in viewing such landscapes through Dante and in placing the poet memorially within locations such as the Casentino and the Lunigiana. Early nineteenth-century British journals, memoirs and guide-books begin to populate key sites in Italy with references to and quotations from Dante, and these also include places in the Apennines.

A notable and influential example is the Scottish schoolmaster Joseph Forsyth's *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts, and Letters*

¹² *Inf.* 16.94–105 and 30.64–69, *Purg.* 5.94–129 and 14.16–54, and *Par.* 11.106–108 (La Verna) The valley of the river Magra is mentioned again in *Purg.* 8.115–117 and *Par.* 9.88–90; and D'Ancona (quoting Bassermann) claims that the Lunigiana "è uno dei punti più notevoli" in the geography of the *Commedia* (D'Ancona, *Dante e la Lunigiana*, 3–4).

¹³ *Purg.* 30.85–99.

¹⁴ Francesco da Buti's commentary on the lines identifies the trees as [white] pines (used in the Middle Ages for shipbuilding and urban construction): "li vivi abeti, dei quali poi quando sono talliati se ne fa travi, e non sono più vivi" (quoted in Chiavacci Leonardi, *Purg.* 30.85, p. 894). Dante would also have been aware of how, in this same context, the Latin word for "beam" (*trabs*) yielded the place-name for one of the major Apennine passes from which timber had been transported: the Bocca Trabaria, above Sansepolcro and close to the *tre confini* of Umbria, Le Marche and Tuscany.

¹⁵ See Paul Westover, *Necromanticism: Travelling to Meet the Dead, 1750–1860* (London: Palgrave, 2012); also, for an excellent introduction to nineteenth-century literary tourism in general, James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture 1800–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

during an *Excursion in Italy in the years 1802 and 1803*.¹⁶ Throughout this account of his travels Forsyth, as Paget Toynbee acknowledged, “displays an intimate acquaintance with the *Divina Commedia*, numerous quotations from which are effectively introduced in the narrative”, and as Toynbee also notes, he seems to have been the first to use the adjective *Dantesque* in English.¹⁷ Forsyth’s travels in Tuscany took place near the start of his long Italian tour, in the spring of 1802. His account of the Apennine stages of his journey focuses chiefly on Camaldoli and La Verna, as the second and third parts of what he called a “pilgrimage to the three sanctuaries [of Tuscany].”¹⁸ This “pilgrimage” invokes Dante at several points: citing the *Paradiso* in epigraphs to the chapters on Camaldoli and La Verna; and quoting the *Inferno*’s forger, Maestro Adamo, on locations and personalities in the Casentino.¹⁹ Then, as he moves on south through the upper Arno valley, Forsyth describes the devastating impact of present-day Apennine deforestation upon the lush landscape that Maestro Adamo had evoked:

Most of the soil, which was then loosened from the roots and washed down by the torrents, lodged in this plain; and left immense beds of sand and large rolling stones, on the very spot where Dante describes:

Li ruscelletti che de’ verdi colli
Del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,
Facendo i lor canali e freddi e molli.²⁰

¹⁶ Forsyth’s *Remarks* were completed during the author’s imprisonment in France; they were first published in: Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on antiquities and letters during an excursion in Italy in the years 1802 and 1803* (Cadell: London, 1813); then in an enlarged and corrected edition after his death: Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on antiquities and letters during an excursion in Italy in the years 1802 and 1803*, second enlarged edition with a memoir by I. Forsyth (London: Murray, 1816). A modern reprint with a useful introduction is edited in: Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on antiquities and letters during an excursion in Italy in the years 1802 and 1803*, ed. Keith Crook (Newark & London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2001). All subsequent references here are to the 1816 edition.

¹⁷ See Forsyth, *Remarks*, 60 (the current online *OED* still records Forsyth’s as the first usage). Toynbee’s comments on him are in his Paget Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary (c. 1380–1844)*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1909), 2: 139 with n. 2.

¹⁸ Forsyth, *Remarks*, 92. The first of the three, on the itinerary from Florence, was Vallombrosa (see below, n. 28) on the western slopes of the Pratomagno.

¹⁹ Forsyth, *Remarks*, 85–6 (quotations from *Par.* 21.106–111 [slightly garbled] and from *Inf.* 30.73–78.) and 90 (quotation from *Par.* 11.106–108).

²⁰ Forsyth, *Remarks*, 93 (quoting *Inf.* 30.64–66 in a form slightly different from modern editions). On the following page, Forsyth (alluding to *Purg.* 14.43–45) also notes that “The Casentines were no favourites with Dante, who confounds the men with their hogs.”

Forsyth's local encounters with this particular dead poet formed an important precedent for other nineteenth-century travellers and travel-writers,²¹ and probably had some influence on a quite prolific sub-genre of works dealing with Dantean topography.

Indeed, some writers in the nineteenth century followed Dante's path quite literally into Italian mountains. In an engaging article called "Notes on Old Tracks: The Mountains of Dante," the distinguished Victorian geographer and alpinist Douglas Freshfield argued that the Florentine poet "knew how to climb" although he argues that it is "the steep cornice paths" leading to upland meadows in the (modern) Alps, rather than the Apennines, that are "surely... the source of the scenery of [Dante's] Purgatory."²² Freshfield's argument was disputed by an Italian climber, journalist and guidebook-writer, Ottone Brentari, who shortly afterwards published a tract under the more bracing title of *Dante alpinista*.²³ Against Freshfield's claims about the Alps, Brentari insisted that

i monti che furono da Dante più di frequente e minutamente vistate e percorsi sono gli Appennini di Toscana, e non meno di essi le Alpe Apuani ed i monti della Liguria.²⁴

However, in Brentari's opinion, the poet "non era un forte salitore", since on the evidence of his performance on Mount Purgatory he shows himself "di frequente stanco ed affaticato."²⁵

As Brentari knew, the fashion for following "in the footsteps of Dante" had taken hold in Italy and elsewhere earlier in the century, notably after a work by the French philologist Jean-Jacques Ampère had presented Dante as a guide to Italy, and Italian landscapes as a potential commentary on Dante. Ampère's *Voyage dantesque* of 1839 subsequently appeared in German and Italian translations, and its approach can be illustrated by the author's account

²¹ For example: Mariana Starke (1762?-1838) author of *Letters from Italy Between the Years 1792 and 1798* (London: Phillips, 1800) and – following a second visit to Italy in 1817 – a succession of immensely successful guide-books from 1820 onwards; also Lady Charlotte Bury, whose *The Three Great Sanctuaries of Tuscany, Vallombrosa, Camaldoli, Laverna: A Poem with Historical and Legendary Notices* (London: Murray, 1833) was based on travels in the Apennines in the autumn of 1818.

²² Douglas Freshfield, "Notes on Old Tracks: The Mountains of Dante," *Alpine Journal* (February 1882): 400-405.

²³ Ottone Brentari, "Dante alpinista," *Bollettino del Club Alpino Italiano* 31 (1887): no. 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 40-1.

of ascending Monte Falterona (here quoted from the Italian version of 1855):

Mi posi in viaggio verso la mezza notte per esservi innanzi alla levata del sole. Io pensavo meco stesso: Quante volte il poeta di cui seguo le traccie, avrà errato su queste montagne! Egli andava e veniva per questi viottoli alpestri recandosi presso i suoi amici della Romagna o della contea di Urbino, col cuore agitato da una speranza che non doveva compiersi mai. Mi figuravo Dante in viaggio con la guida al chiarore delle stelle esposto a tutte le impressioni che producono i luoghi sterili e tribolati, le vie scoscese, le valli profonde, gli accidenti di un lungo e pensoso viaggio; impressioni tutte che ci dovea trasmettere nel suo poema.²⁶

Ampère's itinerary and his placing of Dante firmly upon such peaks would be enthusiastically followed by a number of later literary guides, especially British ones, and as late as 1931 a short illustrated companion to the region would recall that

Ampère says with truth that in no other part of Italy do we find the memories of Dante intertwined with so much personal affection for him as in the Casentino.²⁷

Following the *tracce* (or *orme*) of poets and conjuring up physical and psychic sensations—the *cuore agitato*, the *impressioni che producono i luoghi sterili e tribolati*, as well as “personal affection”—these, as Will Bowers has recently demonstrated, are particularly powerful aspects of nineteenth-century literary tourism in a culture that was “increasingly interested in the lives of dead authors” and driven by an “urge to commune with the ideal authorial presence at a related physical site.”²⁸

²⁶ Jean-Jacques Ampère, *Viaggio dantesco* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1885), 50. An earlier Italian version based on the 1840 German translation by “Theodor Hell” (K.G.T. Winkler) had been published under the title *Viaggio in Italia sulle orme di Dante* (Venice and Treviso: Molena, 1841). The scholarly Captain Francis Brooke (1810–1886) described the latter in his travel-journal of the time as “but superficial and occasionally incorrect” (BL Add. MS 62150, f. 4r). On Ampère, see also Friederich P. Werner, *Dante's Fame Abroad, 1350–1850* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1950), 161–2 and 431 (on the German and Italian translations).

²⁷ G. McCroben, *Dante in the Casentino* (Florence: Giulio Giannini & Sons, 1931), 13–14.

²⁸ Will Bowers, “Vallombrosa Visited, 1638–1851,” forthcoming in *Modern Philology* 2020. I am very grateful to Dr Bowers for permission to quote from the draft of this article and for discussion of the subject. On some other nineteenth-century forms of physical and psychic “communion” with Dante (from “Dante night caps” to necromantic dialogues with the poet), see also my *Dante's British Public* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially pp. 221, 224–5 and 241–2.

Dante's Apennine footprints continued to engage the imaginations of travellers and writers during the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, and here three main examples (Italian, German and British) must suffice. In 1881 Carlo Beni (1849–1932) published his *Guida illustrata del Casentino*, a substantial work that would go through three editions around the turn of the century.²⁹ In addition to serving for thirty years as *sindaco* of his native town, Stia in the upper Arno valley, Beni was a lawyer, naturalist and travel writer. His wide reading is evident in the three editions of the *Guida* and he shows awareness of those who, from Ampère onwards, had traced Dante's presence in the Casentino's mountains. Beni invokes and cites Dante frequently here: in the dedication to Queen Margherita (as “delle memorie di Dante ... investigatrice amorosa”); in chapter epigraphs; and in the epilogue (citing *Par.* 10.25). Not surprisingly, the *Commedia* looms large in his accounts of locations such as Romena, Poppi, Camaldoli and La Verna. Moreover – keenly following the trail blazed by Jean-Jacques Ampère – Beni insists not only that “i monti che furono più frequentemente e minutamente visitati e percorsi sono gli Appennini” but also that it is “indubitato che Dante salì sulle cime del Falterona.”³⁰

Doubts about that Dantean ascent were raised shortly after the publication of Beni's second edition by the German critic and translator, Alfred Bassermann (1856–1935). Bassermann was a well-qualified *dantista* who was in the process of translating the whole *Commedia* into a form of *terza rima* and would publish the first German version of *Il Fiore*, for whose Dantean authenticity he was an early proponent.³¹ In 1897 he published a survey whose title seems on the face of it to be following in the tracks of Ampère, his translators, and Beni's *Guida* but was in fact considerably more ambitious and sceptical. Bassermann's folio volume on *Dantes Spuren in Italien: Wanderungen und Untersuchungen* derived from on the spot research and close attention to Dante's presence in the visual arts (featuring a large number of illustrations, mostly from

²⁹ Florence: Niccolai, 1881 and 1889; Florence: Bemporad, 1908. A re-issue, ed. Fiamma Domestici, appeared as *Guida del Casentino* (Florence: Nardini, 1983).

³⁰ Beni, *Guida* (1983 edn), 209.

³¹ See the article on “Bassermann, Alfred” by W. Theodor Elwert in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, online at: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alfred-bassermann_%28Enciclopedia-Dantesca%29/ [accessed 06/06/19]. Bassermann published the three parts of his *Commedia* translation in 1892, 1909 and 1921, followed by his version of *Il Fiore* in 1926. His interpretation of Dante's enigmatic *Veltro* was, as Elwert notes, “meno felice”, and his fascination with Fascism led him in the early 1930s to identify the figure with both Hitler and Mussolini.

manuscripts of the *Commedia*).³² In his chapter on the Arno valley, the German scholar took cogent issue with both Beni and Ampère on the subject of Dante and Falterona:

Despite the enthusiastic claims of Ampère and Beni, it cannot be said with any certainty that Dante climbed Monte Falterona. The numerous passages from the *Commedia* adduced by Beni indicate solely that Dante experienced a vivid view of mountain landscapes which he could, however, have gained just as well from any peak of the Apennines other than Falterona. Likewise, Ampère's assertion that even the famous description of the course of the Arno in canto 14 of the *Purgatorio* shows that Dante was surveying the whole of the Arno from one viewpoint – and that this viewpoint was Falterona – is not sustainable ... Dante's footsteps do not lead us to the summit of Falterona.³³

Bassermann's scrupulous tracing of those *Fußstapfen* endowed his work with considerable authority. He was familiar with several of the documents relating to Dante's exile, such as the record of the San Godenzo meeting in 1302 and the negotiations on behalf of the Malaspina in 1306.³⁴ “Was ist dann Gelegenheitsgedicht, was ist wirklich erlebt?” (“What basis does the poetry have in reality? what has been actually experienced?”) are key questions in his introduction, and his quest to answer them led not only to major Italian cities but also to remoter locations in the Casentino and the Arno valley, the Apennine passes, and the Lunigiana – the last three regions occupying complete chapters in his book.³⁵ His detailed accounts of Apennine landscapes – the upper Arno valley, the ridge above Camaldoli, the summit of Monte Penna, the waterfall at Acquacheta, the view of Pietrapana in the Apuane, alongside passages from the *Commedia* translated into German *terza rima*

³² It was published in Heidelberg by Carl Winter, followed by a smaller edition (München und Leipzig: R. Oldenbourg, 1898) and an Italian translation by Egidio Gorra (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1902).

³³ “Ob Dante die Falterona erstiegen hätte, läßt sich trotz der begeisterten Behauptungen Ampères und Benis nicht mit Bestimmtheit sagen. Die zahlreichen Stellen der *Divina Commedia*, die Beni heranzieht, zeigen nur überhaupt, daß Dante eine lebendige Anschauung der Bergwelt befaß, die er aber an jedem andern Höhepunkt des Apennins eben so gut gewonnen haben kann wie an der Falterona. Auch Ampères Argumentation, daß eben unsere Schilderung des Arno-Laufes im vierzehnten Gesang des *Purgatorio* dafür spreche, daß Dante von einem Punkt aus der ganzen Arno überblickt habe, und daß dieser Punkt die Falterona sei, ist nicht stichhaltig... Dantes Fußstapfen leiten uns nicht auf den Gipfel der Falterona.” Bassermann, *Dantes Spuren in Italien* (1897 edn), 30.

³⁴ Bassermann, *Dantes Spuren in Italien* (1897 edn), 78 and 157–8. He observes regretfully that the 1306 document, then in the archive at Sarzana had been much damaged by those in search of “einer Original-Unterschrift Dantes” (“an original Dante signature,” 158).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29–49, 75–101, 148–63.

– all reflect the closeness of his response to what he called the “concise clarity” (*knappe Klarheit*) of Dante’s topography.³⁶ Bassermann’s itinerary was quickly reprinted in an elegant and more portable volume, without the expensive illustrations but including (presumably for prospective Dante pilgrims) a map conveniently slotted inside the back cover. As his introduction to this *kleine Ausgabe* states, he aims thus to reach a wider public whilst continuing to show “how firmly and deeply the arcane poet of the afterlife struck his roots in reality and how he drew from that his greatest energy.”³⁷ In the later twentieth century Bassermann’s survey was still thought to combine erudition with vivid descriptions of the places visited, and it continued to be regarded as “il miglior manuale per tanti pellegrinaggi danteschi” in the Apennines and elsewhere.³⁸

Pellegrinaggi danteschi meanwhile were very much in the mind of a less scholarly British writer on the region. In 1905, Ella Noyes (1863–1949) published the first English guidebook to the Casentino, with watercolours and line-drawings by her sister Dora.³⁹ Both had travelled extensively in the area and on the Apennine ridge in 1903–4, and Ella – following again in the footsteps of Ampère – places Dante firmly within the region’s landscape, insisting on features of that landscape as sources for the *Commedia*. Noyes’s account of the procession of pilgrims to the “rock of San Francesco” at La Verna (from Bonaventura to “the gracious Queen Mother Margherita”) gives particular prominence early on to “a certain sad wanderer [Dante] in the Valley below”:

He who must daily through the winter of his discontent have looked up to the *rude rock between Tiber and Arno* and read the message which it bore for his proud soul, assuredly, did not fail to ascend and kneel in the sanctuary of the man whom the love of poverty had carried so high... The figure of the poet, who bore the stigmata of the world’s scorn and misunderstanding ... is alone worthy to be remembered here beside the poet martyr of love ...⁴⁰

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 45, 47–9, 78–83, 161.

³⁷ “wie fest und tief der geheimnisvoller Dichter des Jenseits doch in der Wirklichkeit wurzelte und wie er aus ihr seine beste Lebenskraft zog.” Alfred Bassermann, *Dantes Spuren in Italien* (2nd edn; München and Leipzig: R. Oldenbourg, 1898), iii.

³⁸ Ewert, “Bassermann, Alfred” in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, online (see note 31).

³⁹ Ella Noyes (illustrated by Dora Noyes), *The Casentino and its Story* (London: J.M. Dent and E.P. Dutton, 1905). On the Noyes sisters, see also Francesca White’s preface to Urbano Cipriani, *There Romena Lies: Dante and the Casentino (1289, 1302–1313)* (Stia: Arti Grafiche Cianferoni, 2012), 7–19.

⁴⁰ Noyes, *The Casentino and its Story*, 185–6, quoting *Par.* 11.106.

The following chapter of Noyes's story of the Casentino ("Dante in the Valley") goes on, for example, to portray the terraced hill of Romena as "the figure of the toilsome Mount of Repentance up which it behoved [Dante] to struggle", and prefaces a lengthy list of the "memories of the Casentino" in the *Commedia* with a portrayal once again of Dante as *alpinista*:

The images of the mountains form the framework and architecture of the scenes of Hell and Purgatory, and the poet's painful progress up the cliffs and steeps has in it the remembered anguish of many an arduous climb in the Apennines.⁴¹

"Painful progress" and "arduous climbing" were also to be the lot of many who, several decades on, found themselves in the battle-zone of the Tuscan Apennines during the final year of the Second World War. By mid-September 1944, one thrust of the Allied attack on the Apennine "Gothic Line" was pushing slowly north from the Futa Pass, whilst another prong of that offensive headed westward to Montepiano, then swung north along the valley of the Setta, past Castiglione dei Pepoli, until a month or so later its advance was bogged down in the "mud, death and madness" of that Apennine valley, as one of the combatants would later recall. The combatant quoted was the young soldier-poet Guy Butler (1918–2001), and *Bursting World* was an appropriate title for his memoir of a wartime journey through Italy as an officer with the 6th South African Armoured Division.⁴² Butler's experience of the Italian campaign and of that Apennine winter as "limbo" and "underworld" led him in several ways towards Dante, about whom he had already lectured to a "captivated" company of sappers in Siena.⁴³ For him, as for others, the poetic framework containing the *diverse piaghe* of the *Inferno* offered a way of engaging with – if not understanding – the "bursting" wartime world

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 221 and 224. Similar claims based on Ampère are made in a contemporary British guide to Dante-pilgrimage – by "Christopher Hare" (pseudonym of the prolific historian and novelist Marian Andrews [1838–1929]) in *Dante the Wayfarer* (London and New York: Harper, 1905), especially 83 and 90 (on the poet as "alpine climber" again). On Hare/Andrews, see also Anne Laurence, "Exploiting Dante: Dante and his Women Popularizers, 1850–1910," in *Dante in the Nineteenth Century: Reception, Canonicity, Popularization*, ed. Nick Havely (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), especially 288.

⁴² Guy Butler, *Bursting World: An Autobiography (1936–45)* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983).

⁴³ Butler, *Bursting World*, 238. I have explored Butler's wartime encounter with the Apennines and Dante more fully in a recent essay "On the Tuscan Apennines: Wonders and Warfare," in *Astonishment: Essays on Wonder for Piero Boitani*, ed. Emilia Rocco (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2019), esp. 104–9.

around him. Up in Castiglione, “in the lungs of the clouds”, he struck up a friendship with a learned young Italian monk, Frate Crippa, in whose cell the two would meet for more than a month to read *Macbeth* and the *Inferno*: “ancient works about damnation and salvation [which] struck us both as extraordinarily contemporary.”⁴⁴ Butler’s own experiments in *terza rima*, invented by Dante for the *Commedia*, had been composed “in the mountains” earlier that autumn and had been inspired by Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”; but his twice-weekly readings of the *Inferno* in an Apennine village during “that November’s paradoxical Limbo” provided a direct encounter with Dante’s verse form which, he acknowledged, “was to have far reaching results.”⁴⁵

III

Far reaching results would stem from another Allied soldier’s somewhat earlier wartime reading of Dante in the Apennines. Stuart Hood had been imprisoned in the same camp – at Fontanellato, near Parma – as another well-known British escapee, Eric Newby.⁴⁶ Both of them were released during the Italian armistice of September 1943, but whereas Newby was guided directly south to various refuges in the Apennine foothills and eventually recaptured, Hood, on the other hand, embarked on a much longer and more darkly dramatic Tuscan odyssey, initially accompanied by a former Indian Army officer, Ted Mumford. Hood’s memoir of this time begins with a journey into autumn over the slopes of the Apennines.⁴⁷ In this region, as elsewhere, the *contadini* were traditionally mistrustful of government, and despite the savage reprisals threatened by the Italian Fascists and the Germans, they were ready to trade food and shelter in exchange for the much-needed labour that those on the run could provide.⁴⁸ Interdependencies of this sort are explored in Roger Absalom’s detailed study, *Strange Alliance* and in Eric Newby’s memoir *Love and War in the Apennines*. In Newby’s account they are strikingly illustrated by the endless, back-breaking barrow-loads of rock that he as guest labourer had to heave and tip

⁴⁴ Butler, *Bursting World*, 272.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴⁶ Eric Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines* (London: Picador, 1983), 42.

⁴⁷ Stuart Hood, *Pebbles From My Skull* (London: Hutchinson, 1963) was revised and republished as *Carlino* (Hood’s *nom de guerre*) by Carcanet, 1985, and has appeared again more recently under the original title in a “Faber Finds” edition, 2013. All quotations here are from the first (1963) edition, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁸ Roger N. L. Absalom, *A Strange Alliance: Aspects of Escape and Survival in Italy 1943–45* (Florence: Olschki, 1991), 117, 123–4. Hood also explores the motives of the *contadini* in the “Afterword” to the 1985 edition of his memoir: *Carlino*, 135–6.

over a cliff, at the remote hill-farm where he had taken refuge.⁴⁹ Hood's account of his Apennine autumn is more pastoral in tone, but it too shows him energetically working his passage: helping with the chestnut harvest, treading grapes, ploughing, hoeing, cutting maize – spending about eight weeks on the “wrong” (i.e., northern) side of the Apennines in a kind of “crude Arcadia” – perhaps, Hood speculates “because we were still not ready to face the world.”⁵⁰ As winter began to approach, he and Mumford eventually crossed the ridge near Abetone at the beginning of November, narrowly avoiding recapture when Hood stumbled into a bar full of Fascist militia below the snowy pass.⁵¹

Turning south-east and trudging through the late autumn rains in the hills above San Marcello and Pistoia, Hood and Mumford eventually came at the beginning of December to that mountain village of Migliana, looking out over the Bisenzio valley near Prato. As the winter evening fell on their path down from the ridge, the escapees encountered the first of the Italian partisans with whom Hood's lot would be cast for the remainder of the war: a figure with “a fringe of moustache on his lip, a hat on the back of his head and a raincoat, like a gunman out of an Irish play.”⁵² This initially sinister figure was “Franco”, an energetic anti-Fascist and son of a peasant, who – finding difficulty in pronouncing “Stuart” – would give Hood his partisan *nom de guerre* (“Carlino”).⁵³ Following this strange meeting, the two fugitives were then given refuge in Franco's father's farmhouse at “Le Valli” – perhaps what the modern local map calls “Cascina Valle” – higher up the hillside to the north of the village and on the edge of the woods.

Hood's first stay in Migliana lasted only a couple of weeks, and he would return there, alone and in fear for his life, early in January 1944, after a disastrous episode in the early history of the Tuscan Resistance. Following the September 1943 armistice and the outbreak of the Italian “civil war”, many partisan groups were organizing and defining themselves politically as Communists, “Action Party”, Socialists, Christian Democrats, or Monarchists, and motives for joining them varied widely.⁵⁴ Hood's own initial

⁴⁹ Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines*, 106–11.

⁵⁰ Hood, *Pebbles From My Skull*, 37–8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵³ On the variety of partisan *noms de guerre*, see Pavone, *A Civil War*, 224–5 and 534.

⁵⁴ On the wide range of partisan motives and ideologies, see, for example: Maurizio Fiorillo, *Uomini alla macchia: Bande partigiane e guerra civile. Lunigiana 1943–1945* (Rome: Laterza, 2010), 29, 58, 131, 142, 159–74; and Pavone, *A Civil War*, 51, 183,

partisan ally “Franco”, for instance, is later described as a dedicated subversive, “strangely compounded, utterly brave.”⁵⁵

After Hood’s death in 2011, a (somewhat belated) obituary in the *Guardian* would record that

[h]e joined the local partisans and became “Carlino”, a leader of the Tuscan resistance. The experience carried no romance, and he was to remain haunted by it into old age: the death of comrades, the treachery and execution of spies, horrors and moral quagmires.⁵⁶

Trauma is indeed one abiding impression of Hood’s own memoir – from its initial disturbing title (*Pebbles from My Skull*) to the guilt, cynicism and despair that would lead the author to describe the book’s autobiographical process in its penultimate sentence as “an attempted jail-break.”⁵⁷ Very shortly after the war he would write about the decision to pass a death sentence on a suspected spy, and again, more than half a century later, he would recall how he learned “to apply the cruel logic of partisan warfare” with the resulting “deaths on my conscience.”⁵⁸ Yet the evocative account of the earlier stages in that autumn journey through an Apennine “Arcadia” begins to suggest that his story was, also in part, one of recovery; and in the later article he would see it as

an attempt to describe what it had been like to live with the peasants and be involved in a culture – *la civiltà contadinesca* – which by the 1960s no longer existed.⁵⁹

In the Apennine chapters of *Pebbles from My Skull* the scrutiny to which Hood subjects the characters of the Italian partisans is also turned upon his own motives for joining them. At a crucial moment near the end of his first spell in Migliana, there were immediate practical reasons for moving on across the mountains into partisan held territory: spies and informers were leading a “network of danger” to close in upon the village, and anything more than temporary refuge was increasingly hard to find. But there were deeper personal motives driving him too: the shame of capture in North Africa and “the greater guilt that I had been content not to

194, 429-30, 439 *et passim*.

⁵⁵ Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 51.

⁵⁶ Obituary by Brian Winston in *The Guardian* 22 Dec. 2011.

⁵⁷ Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 153.

⁵⁸ Stuart Hood, “The Valley,” in *The Penguin New Writing 30*, ed. John Lehmann (London: Penguin, 1947), 170-81; Stuart Hood, “Partisan Memories,” *History Today* (August 2001): 13.

⁵⁹ Hood “Partisan Memories,” 13.

fight in Spain"; hence, looking east from Migliana, beyond the ridge of Monte Calvana towards the distant partisan outpost above Florence at Monte Morello, Hood saw up in those hills "men who would give me the chance to prove myself."⁶⁰

Beneath this seemingly romantic impulse lay awareness of political affiliations and obligations. He had joined the Communists as a student in Edinburgh, and it was the Party that had ordered him to volunteer for service in the present war.⁶¹ His contemporary and fellow POW, Eric Newby, recalled that, while in the Italian camp at Fontenellato from which they both emerged in September 1943, Hood disagreed with the predominantly upper-crust British officer class on more or less every issue – including the reasons for which the war was being fought – and that he was regarded by them as "Bolshie and odd".⁶² He would probably have fought in the Spanish Civil War, had he been allowed to: one of his friends commented recently that the reason he did not do so was that in the period before the outbreak of the World War he was needed for the party's intellectual *cadre*.⁶³ Over on Monte Morello, then, in December 1943 another conflict – and other exigencies – had now lifted that restriction, and this crossing of the Apennine foothills – a third of the way through his memoir – marks a key moment in Hood's journey through wartime Tuscany.

Hood's partnership with that group of partisans would be short-lived, traumatic in its immediate outcome and problematic in its longer-term consequences. The motives and origins of these fighters and fugitives made up a complex mixture. The group was headed, like a number of the partisan brigades, by a former Italian regular soldier, Lanciotto Ballerini, "a fighter, a Communist, innocent of doctrine, fearless himself but with no knack of leading men."⁶⁴ As Hood later reckoned, Ballerini's followers comprised twelve Italians (disbanded soldiers and *renitenti* fleeing enlistment), two Russians (erstwhile prisoners of war and forced labourers in

⁶⁰ Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 55–6.

⁶¹ I owe this information to Jill Hood, who was married to Stuart Hood for some years.

⁶² Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines*, 42.

⁶³ Information from the late Catherine Fried. A Communist intellectual in one of Hood's later novels answers a question about his reasons for not fighting in Spain by saying "I wanted to but the Party line was that too many intellectuals were getting themselves killed there and this was an intolerable loss;" see Stuart Hood, *The Upper Hand* (Manchester: Caracanet, 1987), 143. For Hood's explanation of his political stance and motives, see his "Afterword" to *Carlino*, 140–1.

⁶⁴ Hood *Pebbles from My Skull*, 62. For a later assessment of Ballerini and his memorialization, see Hood, "Partisan Memories", 9 and 14–15.

the German “Todt” organization), and two Yugoslavs – like Hood, escapees from POW camps.

Occupying a cattle shed on Monte Morello over Christmas, they waited for orders, debating politics and Allied strategy, looking out over Florence, and occasionally visiting farms and townships in the valley below. Orders then came: to take the motley collection of Italian weapons that Sergeant Ballerini had appropriated from Italian army stores and move higher up into the Apennines. Most of the group (including Hood) then crossed back to the ridge of Calvana just south of Monte Maggiore. Here, in a stone barn by the ancient deserted settlement of Valibona, they set up their new headquarters. On 4 January 1944, disaster struck, when, as Hood’s terse later narrative describes:

[j]ust before dawn the barn was surrounded by a force of fifty or more Fascist militia and *carabinieri*. The surprise was total, for the group had not posted sentries. An engagement which lasted at least a couple of hours was fought from inside and outside the barn. When the firing died away the barn was in flames, three of the group – including the commander Lanciotto Ballerini – were dead, eight had been captured, four of them wounded. Four – of whom I was one – escaped.⁶⁵

The vicious skirmish at Valibona featured in various later “official” accounts. The Fascist press (such as the *Corriere della sera* and *Nazione*) reported it as a successful operation against “Russian-led” rebellion and “banditry” – “brigands” being the term that German and Italian Fascist propaganda would frequently use to describe the partisans.⁶⁶ For the partisans of the region, on the other hand, the episode acquired the status of a heroic legend. The “Battle of Valibona” was and is still celebrated as the first confrontation between the Tuscan resistance and the forces of Fascism; and in his article on the politics of commemoration, Hood finds some aspects of the locally “authorised version of the incident” questionable. The celebratory account of the “battle”, he argues, reflects “some of the problems attached to the historiography of the Italian Resistance, which for too long was uncritical... too reluctant to face up to errors and unnecessary deaths.”⁶⁷ “Why had I not insisted that they post sentries?” was a question he himself would raise in the memoir of 1963 and would still feel obliged to address in the “Partisan Memories” article forty years on. Like the wound on his

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14, 15. He had also raised the issue in the “Afterword” to the 1985 edition of *Carlino* (135).

wrist – torn by a barbed wire fence during his flight across the crest of Calvana – such memories ‘festered and would not heal’.”⁶⁸

The fugitive “English captain” found refuge once again in Migliana. Here he would remain for a month, confined to the top floor of a tall house in the middle of the village: sometimes arguing with his host’s pious daughter about a variety of topics, including religion and the relative greatness of Dante and Shakespeare;⁶⁹ and occasionally emerging for Sunday lunch with the family. Mostly, however, his time was spent looking out across the river towards the snow on Calvana and Monte Morello and reading. Long weekdays, sitting at the “cold window” beneath the roof, were passed with the aid of half a dozen books – ranging from a volume of Horace’s Odes and an erotic novel to “a school reader full of quotations from the Duce and poems in praise of bread”; but it seems that Hood’s main resource during this period of suspended animation was – as it would be a year later in Guy Butler’s Apennine “limbo” – Dante’s *Inferno*. Failure to make progress in the mountains, headlong flight, despair and the need for guidance are all of course features of the scene in Canto 1 of the *Inferno*, as they were of Hood’s situation over that Apennine winter, and he thus began to read and understand the poem “now for the first time.”⁷⁰

Two of Hood’s six books were editions of the *Commedia*: one with “Daumier’s [probably Doré’s?] illustrations”; the other “a school edition of the same with notes.”⁷¹ As a student at Edinburgh before the war, he had read Italian (and English), and would probably have had little difficulty with Dante’s language. Not surprisingly, then, overlooking the valley of the Bisenzio from his chilly attic window, he was also struck by the force of the *Commedia*’s local, political and personal associations. Among the souls of those who have betrayed their kindred and are now fixed in the ice of Cocytus the first to be encountered are a pair whose hair is frozen together, who are clenched close like the staves in a barrel and, despite these bonds, continue to butt each other like billygoats. Another icebound soul identifies them and their origins:

“Se vuoi saper chi son cotesti due,
la valle onde Bisenzio si dichina
del padre loro Alberto e di lor fue.
D’un corpo usciro; e tutta la Caina
potrai cercare, e non troverai ombra

⁶⁸ Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 85.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

degna più d'esser fitta in gelatina.”⁷²

As Hood recognized, the valley over which the sons of Alberto degli Alberti had, like the Theban twins, fought to the death disputing their father's legacy was also the place in which he was taking part in another fratricidal struggle, and where he was himself confined during a modern wintry season in hell. For him – as for others engaged in Italy's vicious civil conflict and in the Allied war of attrition on the Gothic Line – Dante's “drama of damnation” became “extraordinarily contemporary.”⁷³ What Hood may not have known was that the same broad “track between high grassy walls” which he and his partisan companions had climbed on their way up to that ill-fated barn at Valibona was itself one of the ancient roads constructed by that same Alberti clan, to link their lands in the Mugello with those castles and estates in the Val di Bisenzio – lands for which the two Alberti brothers would be at each other's throats whilst hell freezes over them. As Hood notes – when describing himself looking up from his reading towards Monte Morello and the Bisenzio valley – the Alberti brothers had “fought to the death over the inheritance” and now “the ice clasps them together”; whilst he leaves it to the reader to judge how an appropriate an image this would be for the first winter of Italy's *guerra civile*.⁷⁴

As the Fascist militia closed in again upon Migliana during the spring of 1944, Hood took up the more portable of those editions of the *Commedia* and set out across the Bisenzio valley in sunnier weather. On his journey south-east, past Pontassieve and down the Arno valley he would on occasion “lie up all day in a patch of heath and sleep or read Dante.”⁷⁵ The first canto of the *Inferno* would give him the title and epigraphs for the two main parts of his 1963 memoir: ‘The Savage Wood’ and ‘The Sweet Season’.⁷⁶ In the memoir itself he would thus continue like some of those nineteenth-century writers – though with somewhat more urgency – to read the Italian landscape in terms of Dante's poem.

Hence, at another liminal moment – just before he joins another group of partisans further south at Monte Amiata – Hood crosses the stream of the Arbia which, he recalls, had seen conflict

⁷² *Inf.* 32.55–60.

⁷³ The phrase is from Guy Butler's *Bursting World*, 272, and refers to his reading of both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Dante's *Inferno* in the Apennines during the winter of 1944–45.

⁷⁴ Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁶ *Inf.* 1.5 and 43; Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 14f. and 99f.

during a much earlier war in Tuscany.⁷⁷ The battle of Montaperti near Siena (1260), had, as he knew, been commemorated in Hell by another memory-haunted pilgrim and partisan. Walking among the burning tombs on the outskirts of the City of Dis, Dante encounters an old enemy of his party: Farinata degli Uberti, a Florentine who had fought and defeated his own fellow-citizens at Montaperti beside the Arbia. Now from within the grave, Farinata asks his fellow-citizen why Florentine hostility still pursues him and his family. The battle had taken place more than six years before Dante's birth, but half a century later its scars are still unhealed and he retorts:

“Lo strazio e 'l grande scempio
che fece l'Arbia colorata in rosso,
tal orazion fa far nel nostro tempio.”⁷⁸

Again without making its relevance explicit, Hood presents this episode in the *Inferno* and in the history of medieval Florentine civic conflict as a kind of prologue to his own further engagement in the modern Tuscan *guerra civile*. He was not by any means the first to draw such a parallel: back in 1921, for example, a Florentine diarist had seen the Fascists and the Left “pitted against each other as if the malign spirit of the Middle Ages had restored to old feelings of the Blacks and Whites.”⁷⁹ But Hood's allusion at this point in his narrative to how Farinata “with Sienese militia and German mercenaries [had] cut down his fellow-townsmen” makes the *Inferno* yet more (to use Guy Butler's phrase again) “extraordinarily contemporary.”

Five years after the end of the war, Hood's reading of Dante would continue to be reflected in his writing about Apennine communities and conflict. His 1950 novel, *The Circle of the Minotaur* is a story balanced between war and peace, renewal and revenge.⁸⁰ Its protagonist, a former partisan, returns to the Bisenzio valley to recall recent battles (including Valibona) and confront continuing enmities. His name – Carlo Pacini – recalls both Hood's own *nom de guerre* as partisan (Carlino) and the *rifugio* – above Migliana on the Apennine ridge between the Limentra and Bisenzio valleys – that had been built in the 1930s on land donated by Cavaliere Luigi

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁸ *Inf.* 10.85–87.

⁷⁹ Mario Piazzesi's diary, March 1921, quoted in Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy* (London: Bodley Head, 2012), 44.

⁸⁰ Stuart Hood, *The Circle of the Minotaur* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950).

Pacini.⁸¹ Hood's novel is a bleak tale – stronger, perhaps, in its evocation of place and memory than in its handling of character or dialogue – and it carries a strong sense of the persistence of local feuds after the *guerra civile* of 1943–5 and the *resa dei conti* which followed.⁸² In doing so, it explicitly takes as its point of departure one of the earlier representations of faction and violence in Dante's *Inferno*; and the significance of its title is partly explained by the Italian epigraph facing the novel's first page:

A guardia del settimo Cerchio sta il Minotauro, presso una riviera di sangue bollente ove stanno i violenti in altrui. I quali vengono saettati dai Centauri, se tentino uscir dal sangue più del dovuto. — *Inferno*, Canto XII⁸³

Published in the same volume as *The Circle of the Minotaur* was an escape narrative set in a period of civil war – *The Fisherman's Daughter: A Tale* – and here a more oblique allusion to Dante occurs at a critical moment. The protagonist has to cross a river on his way to the frontier, and is preparing to do so near the end of the story whilst watching a boat “with the outline of the old man [the fisherman] in the stern.” As he does so, he remembers “with a sense of overwhelming melancholy a rainy Sunday afternoon in his childhood, an old book with a steel engraving – a boatman crossing a dark unearthly river.”⁸⁴ At this point “Carlino” seems to be recalling both his Tuscan crossings and the figure of Charon in that illustrated edition of the *Commedia* which he read at another “melancholy” moment in an Apennine winter.⁸⁵

Shortly after these two fictions, Hood published a picaresque, Greene-like novel dealing with post-war projects and bureaucracies, entitled *Since the Fall* and billed as:

the adventures of an earnest young man let loose in a world of internationalists. The scene is Italy, with memories of the Resistance and its legacy in the background; the occasion, a conference of CAOS, an international organization not unlike UNESCO.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Pacini was an honorary member of the Club Alpino Italiano which ran the refuge; see <https://www.caiprato.it/informazioni/rifugio-luigi-pacini-al-pian-della-rasa/>.

⁸² On the *resa dei conti*, see John Foot, *Italy's Divided Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 168–82, n. 52 (for Italian sources) and index, *s.v.* 'resa dei conti'. Hood returns to the subject of postwar local feuds in the “Afterword” to *Carlino*, 139–40.

⁸³ Hood, *The Circle of the Minotaur*, facing p. 1.

⁸⁴ Hood, *The Circle of the Minotaur* and *The Fisherman's Daughter*, 221.

⁸⁵ Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 83.

⁸⁶ Stuart Hood, *Since the Fall* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955), flyleaf blurb.

The “earnest young man” is another version of “Carlino” in later life: an ex-soldier, escapee and partisan called Gavin Hamilton, who is now based as a press officer to that “international organization” in Florence where he chances to meet an ebullient figure named Peter Seabrooke, who seems to be based on Hood’s former companion on the Apennine journey, the Indian Army officer Ted Mumford. As they investigate a somewhat sinister-sounding project on “somatology and senescence” at a research institute south of Florence, Peter and Gavin encounter its PR officer who on handing them his visiting card, proudly announces that he has “a very famous name... Uberti. Dante – you know the great Italian poet, Dante? – he talks about us in the *Inferno*.”⁸⁷ The reference is lost on the bluff Peter/Mumford but the “earnest” Gavin/Hood has of course read his Dante, and for him it prompts a grim association of ideas:

The proud heresiarch, thought Gavin, rises bolt upright in his burning tomb, hearing a Tuscan tongue. It speaks of somatology and senescence.⁸⁸

The ghost of Dante’s Ghibelline heretic – and of Tuscan factionalism – continued to haunt Hood’s memoirs and fiction. A much later novel of 1991, *A Den of Foxes* takes its Scottish protagonist back to the Chianti hills and to intermittent memories of conflicts between partisans and Fascists, merging at one moment with the visible signs in the landscape and architecture of the ancient rivalry between the Tuscan Guelphs and Ghibellines.⁸⁹ Shortly before the publication of *A Den of Foxes*, Hood’s “Afterword” to the 1985 edition of his memoir, had described how, during one of his own return visits to Tuscany, he had located the site of a farm near Montaperti where he had been “under surveillance” whilst waiting for his next enlistment with the partisans in the Chianti region.⁹⁰ Here, as well as searching out members of the Tuscan family who had hosted him back in the “sweet season” of 1944, Hood also bleakly notes the signs of present political, social and economic change – amongst them erosion on the terraced hillsides due to farming practices brought in by foreign landowners. In a way that recalls his Scottish predecessor, Joseph Forsyth and

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁹ Stuart Hood, *A Den of Foxes* (London: Methuen, 1991), 145.

⁹⁰ Hood, *Carlino*, “Afterword,” 141–4. The date of this return is not given but was “previous” to a visit in 1981, when Hood returned to Migliana (136–41).

his comments on deforestation in the Casentino – Hood also brings the *Inferno* once again to bear upon a landscape where he now sees

the topsoil wash away and fill the little river [the Arbia], which Dante described as red with blood, ankle deep in red silt.”⁹¹

“My school Dante” is how Hood describes the volume he had carried away from his Apennine refuge early in 1944, as he walked on down the Valdarno, over the Monti di Chianti, and across the Arbia towards his continuing commitment to the partisans and their civil war. After the war Dante would provide further schooling for the Scottish *partigiano* and would inform his writing about the mountains and valleys of Tuscany, but by this point in Carlino’s crossings of the Apennines he already felt that the *Commedia* had been “read and understood now for the first time.”⁹²

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 142. Compare Forsyth, *Remarks*, 93, above, p. 93 and n. 20.

⁹² Hood, *Pebbles from My Skull*, 83, 87 and 94.